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Written statement* submitted by the Institut international pour la paix, la justice et les droits de l'Homme - IIPJDH, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[16 February 2015]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Tangible steps should be taken to halt all kind of violence against children during armed conflict. Nigerian school attacks and the responsibility of State Parties

The International Institute for Peace, Justice and Human Rights (IIPJHR) is an international human rights organisation aimed at promoting and protecting human rights and development. One cornerstone topic of its program is children, especially in the situation of armed conflict. In this regard, IIPJHR is monitoring and drawing attention to situations where the rights of children are violated, and advocates for the improvement of such circumstances.

All forms of sexual violence against children are violations of their human rights under International Human Rights law and International Humanitarian Law. However, children, and especially girls under the age of 18 often make up the majority of survivors of sexual violence in conflict and conflict-affected countries,[1] and gender-based inequality is usually exacerbated during situations of extreme violence such as armed conflict.[2]

A number of resolutions related to children in armed conflict have been issued by the UN Security Council (SC). Each one either adds more obligations to State Parties to protect children, or uses stronger language. SC resolution 1882 of 2009, specifies sexual violence against children during armed conflict as a critical priority. State Parties were called upon to prepare and implement action plans to address these violations.[3]

Still, statistics by UNICEF estimate that by the end of 2014, there was 230 million[4] children worldwide living in countries and areas affected by armed conflict. The problem is very prominent in Nigeria, which was the most deadly country for children in the world in 2014.[5]

This occurred despite the fact that the UN Security Council adopted resolution 2143 from March 7 2014, which strongly condemns attacks on schools. Further this resolution urges all parties in armed conflict to respect the civilian character of schools, protect them from being used or attacked in accordance with international humanitarian law, and also calls for further and improved monitoring and reporting of violations.[6] The armed group Boko Haram have abducted hundreds of children, among them, over 200 school girls taken from Chibok, in April 2014.

Communications from Boko Haram, reports, and statements from people who have escaped, indicate a high level of forced conversions, sexual violence, and forced marriages of children. Young girls are sometimes kept as "wives" when other children are released. One 17 year old girl who escaped recounted the forced marriage of a girl as young as four, who would wait until puberty to consummate the marriage.[7]

The attack on the girls' school in Chibok was in clear violation of multiple basic human rights and rights of the child, such as the right to security, the right not to be subjected to cruel or degrading treatment, and the right to education.

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[1] http://www.savethechildren.org.uk/sites/default/files/docs/Unspeakable_Crimes_Against_Children.pdf
[2] http://www.unicef.org/graca/women.htm
[3] https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/effects-of-conflict/six-grave-violations/sexual-violence/
[4] http://www.unicef.org/about/execboard/index_79715.html
[5] https://childrenandarmedconflict.un.org/press-release/urgent-action-to-protect-children-in-north-east-nigeria/
[6] http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/2143
[7] http://www.hrw.org/zh-hans/node/130172/section/6

Both parties to the conflict have responsibilities and obligations to protect children during this ongoing armed conflict. International human rights organisations have reported that "Civilian Joint Task Forces" operating in Nigeria have been using children between 15 and 17 to watch checkpoints in Maiduguri.[8] Despite the reality that both parties are violating children's rights, IIPJHR recognises the different levels of their practices.

The importance of access to health care during conflict and post conflict periods is stressed in resolution 2143. For children who have experienced the mental and physical trauma of being associated with armed groups in conflict, the most urgent need is to try to recover. However, there are usually little or no appropriate measures taken to assist with their healing. It has been noted in Nigeria that few of the abducted children who have managed to escape have good access to counselling and other health services.[9]

Despite numerous resolutions regarding children in armed conflict, and with the condemnations from all state members in HRC, as individual states and collectively, children are still victimised during armed conflicts around the world, including in Nigeria. No serious steps were taken to break or minimise this pattern. For these reasons and for the sake of childhood, IIPJHR:

- Urges the Council to decide on concrete and determined steps to halt violence during armed conflict, and take tangible action to make a difference for a better generation of mankind
- Remind the state of Nigeria that its ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and its Optional Protocol on the involvement of Children in armed conflict means that the government has a responsibility to protect children from all kinds of physical and mental violence. This also includes necessary social support and treatment of children who have experienced such circumstances.
- Calls the international community to work jointly and take actual measures to put an end to the grave violations of children's rights happening in Nigeria, and other conflicts in the world, by holding all violators of these rights accountable.
- Recommends all groups and parties currently engaged in the use of children in armed conflict in any form to cease this immediately. Furthermore, IIPJHR encourages respect for school buildings and demands the immediate termination of all attacks on schools.

[8] https://www.amnesty.org.uk/sites/default/files/nigeria__more_than_1500_killed_in_armed_conflict_0.pdf
[9] http://watchlist.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2111-Watchlist-Nigeria_LR.pdf